

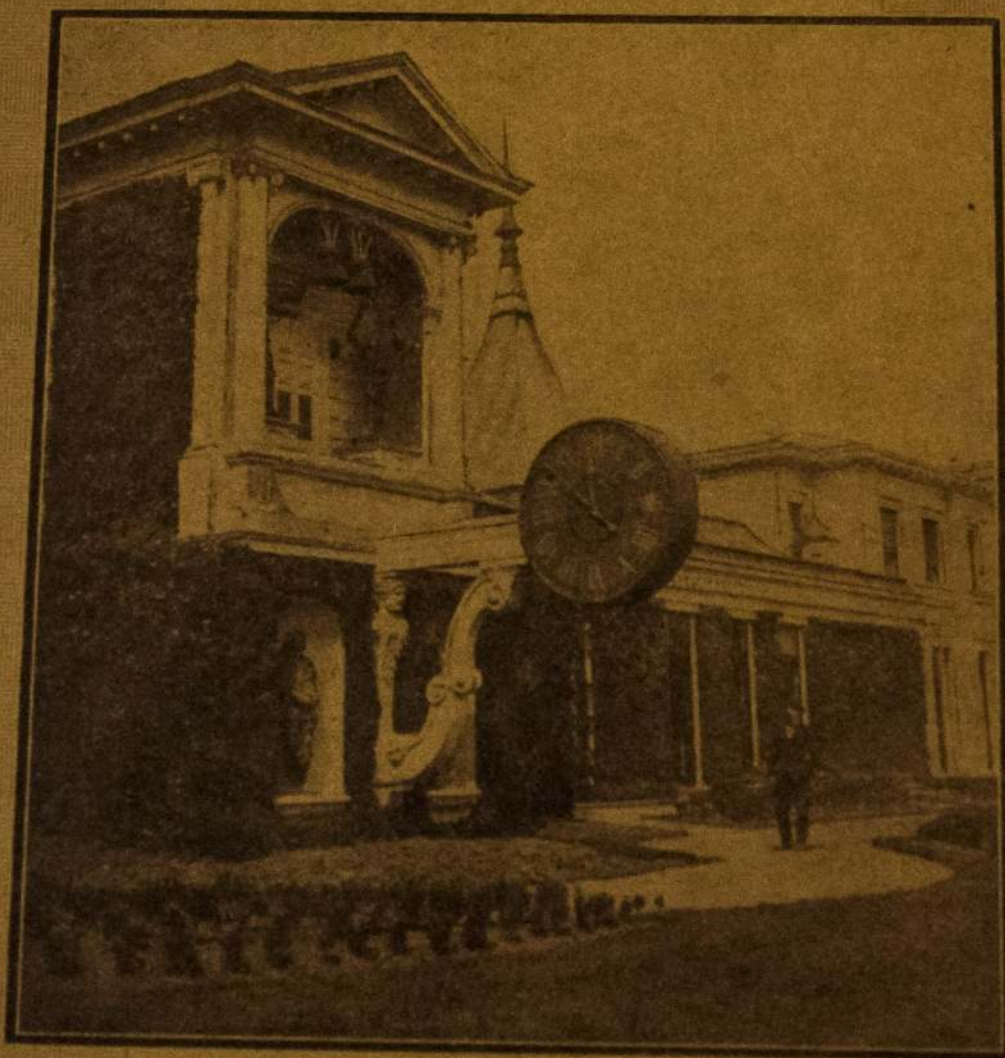
# Review

Blind Veterans UK, St Dunstan's since 1915,  
2015 Centenary Review Special.





# St. Dunstan's



## Revue.



No. 1.

1s. net.

## The Review celebrates its centenary.

In July the Review quietly celebrated its own very special anniversary as the first edition of the Review, then spelt Revue, was published in July 1915. To mark our centenary we bring you an interview with Lord Ashcroft KCMG PC as he speaks of his collection of Victoria Crosses and George Crosses and The Lord Ashcroft Gallery at the Imperial War Museum in London.

But first to the early Review. It was light hearted in tone and often facetious, with articles on rowing on the lake, Visitors' Day, the VADs, and poems, including the inevitable parody of Kipling's If. It reveals a lot about the spirit at St Dunstan's Lodge, as written in a humorous vein it reflected the brave spirit of those First World War blind veterans who made fun of their difficulties.

It is not known who started the Revue, but the first piece of editorial, a letter from the editor, is reproduced below. This featured in the July 1915 Revue, which was sold for 1S. Net.

'St Dunstan's as you all know is a hostel for blinded soldiers and sailors. What then could be more desirable than a magazine for their benefit which is useless to them? Nobody wants it, and so I consider it my duty to bring one out.

'It is not an advertisement of cheap wit, nor is it meant to make you laugh at the expense of others. It merely chronicles a few of the actual happenings at St Dunstan's. You will, I am sure, agree with me in saying that when one sees such a large number and such a quaint assortment of people as one does here, their doings and sayings should not be allowed to sink unrecorded into utter oblivion.

'It is hoped that none of our articles will be considered impertinent or personal, but everyone here is so jolly and full of fun that they cannot help being amused by all who come and go, and even those who stay.

'It will probably be remarked "Why do they not bring out their magazine in Braille, so that the officers and men can read it?" That is what we also say, and so, dear reader, if you happen to know Braille we shall be more than grateful to you if you will carry out your own suggestion.

'We should also much appreciate any articles for our next issue, and we hope — there being no tax on hope — to answer all letters and inquiries, which may be addressed to The Editor, 12 Kensington Gate, W.'



Sadly only four articles were offered, two from the same man, and in the next issue, published three months later, the Editor threatened to stop publication unless there was better literary support. Presumably there was not, for he carried out his threat and our charity was without a magazine for the next six months.

Then one of our first masseurs, William Girling, revived the idea — according to his account, just for his own amusement. He was not fit enough to take part in games, and he indulged a taste for scribbling. The first edition was modest enough, consisting of a single typewritten copy. It was an immediate success, and a month later Girling brought out his second number, with a print of a thousand which sold out within a week.

William Girling qualified as a masseur before the end of the magazine's first revival year. Soon afterwards it had a sighted Editor, the Workshop Superintendent Charles Rose for a few months. He was followed by Richard King Huskinson who was both a professional journalist — he did a weekly book review and essay for the *Tatler* — and like Rose, was a voluntary helper at St Dunstan's. He had no official rank, but he was called Adjutant and he was a good friend to all of the blind veterans at Regent's Park. He wrote a chapter for Sir Arthur Pearson's book on the psychology of the blinded soldier, and the then Captain Ian Fraser helped him with the magazine, becoming joint editors, until Fraser took over the editorship in February 1918.

Ian Fraser's big scoop as editor of the *Review* was an interview with Corporal Mason who was torpedoed on his way back to South Africa after his training. He was in a ship's boat for nine hours, and handled one of the heavy oars that pulled the survivors — who included his mother — to the safety of the British destroyer. His rowing in Regent's Park stood him in good stead. A typically modest hero, when he arrived back at St Dunstan's unexpectedly he apologised for having lost his typewriter and poultry outfit.

In his 1919 autobiography, *Victory Over Blindness*, our founder Sir Arthur Pearson, Bt GBE wrote: 'I could fill many pages with interesting extracts from St Dunstan's *Review*, but this book bids fair to be long enough without these.

'Among the articles which I remember with a special interest was one entitled *Trouting by Touch*, which was written by an officer who had been an eager fisherman in his sighted days, and who continued to throw a fly with great skill and success after he had lost his sight. An article called *Riding in the Dark* by

one of the officers who continued to take a keen delight in horseback exercise, and another on golf for blind men written by a private soldier who had been an expert at the royal and ancient game in days gone by, and who continued to derive a great deal of pleasure from golfing. While of course unable to play a round just as people who can see play it, he showed that a blind golfer can take part in a foursome which is played under rather elastic conditions, for there would obviously be some situations in which it would be impossible for him to take his turn, and a great deal of fun and good exercise can be derived from practice shots.

'To each I contributed a few pages, in which I dealt with matters of general interest to St Dunstaners past and present, and in which I gave hints in regard to ways in which my experience had led me to believe blind people should comport themselves. A monthly feature, called *Notes on St Dunstan's Men From All Part of the World*, told, often in their own words, of how fellows who had left were getting on, and proved, I believe, a very invigorating stimulant to those who were passing through the initial stages.

'Sports Notes served to maintain the keenest interest in athletics, and led many men who had left to continue outdoor amusements with zest.

'The various phases of work at St Dunstan's were dealt with under separate headings, and men who had distinguished themselves in any way received their due meed of commendation.

'The sessions of the Debating Club, and the various entertainments were duly noticed, and each number contained verses, grave or gay, contributed by St Dunstaners past or present.'

To illustrate Sir Arthur's points we conclude with three items from the early *Review*. The first is *Notes by the Chief*, signed CAP (Cyril Arthur Pearson). The second is a *Letter from Matron Hughes* with a wonderful photograph that illustrates life at Regent's Park. And finally *Editorial Notes* by the then editor William Girling.





## Notes by the Chief

**D**URING the last month I have had several very interesting letters from Colonial St. Dunstanners. Lieutenant Baker, who, I think, taking him all round, adapted himself to his new conditions with greater speed and adeptness than any other officer, non-commissioned officer, or private soldier who has been with us, has since his return to Canada been given an important appointment on the staff of the Hydro-Electric Power Company. This is one of the biggest concerns in Canada, and its business is the manufacture of electricity from power derived from the great Niagara Waterfall and the distribution of this electricity over a wide area. Sir Adam Beck, who is president of the company, said many complimentary things in public of the wonderful way in which Lieutenant Baker had adapted himself to his new conditions, and predicted for him a brilliant future in the service of the Hydro-Electric Power Company.

Sergeant Woods, who has returned to New Zealand, to practise there the art of massage which he learnt with us, sent me a most interesting letter, telling of his experiences on his voyage out on a hospital ship. He had twelve regular patients to treat during the voyage, and was highly complimented by the medical officer in charge for the improvement which he effected in their condition.

Hills writes from Australia, saying that those who have to do with blind folk there have never heard of poultry farming as an occupation for blind men, and have done all they could to dissuade him from going in for it. Hills, however, says that he is not going to allow himself to be discouraged, and intends to utilise the poultry instruction he gained here. He proposes to spend a few weeks at an Australian poultry farm in order to

familiarise himself with any alteration in method which the difference of climate and other considerations may make necessary.

Hills tells me a very gloomy story of seven blinded Australians who have returned to either Victoria or South Australia and who do not care to enter the blind institutions there. He says he has never met seven more miserable men. These are men of whom I told you last month as having been sent direct to Australia without being given the chance of entering St. Dunstan's. He tells a brighter story of some others who have entered the admirably conducted Institute for the Blind at Sydney in New South Wales. But these, he says, are quite different to the men of St. Dunstan's, adding, "I often shudder when I think of how near I was to missing St. Dunstan's, and I shall never be tired of singing its praises wherever I am." The Sydney Institute for the Blind is one of the very best in the world; but as I am never tired of stating, St. Dunstan's is not an institution for the blind in the ordinary sense of the term. It is a special place, specially planned for very special circumstances, and those in control of blind institutions throughout the kingdom cheerfully admit that fellows who lose their sight at the Front have much better opportunities and a much better time here than they could possibly have at any ordinary institution for the blind.

Several people have spoken to me about the last month's note in which I wrote of "handicap versus affliction." I dare say that you may be interested to hear of an experience in this matter which I had nearly a twelvemonth ago. I was visiting a very large school for blind children in the North of England. Its pupils number over two hundred,



and it is quite a model school of its kind. The children were all collected in a large hall and sang some songs very charmingly. Then the chairman asked me if I would say a few words to them, and on my consenting introduced me in a little speech, in which he referred to the children as "these afflicted little ones," and to me as "sharing their affliction."

When my turn came I began my remarks by saying, "Now children, I am going to ask your chairman as a personal favour to me, and as a memento of my visit here to-day, to promise never to mention that beastly word affliction when speaking of or to a blind person again."

Those two hundred little blind children clapped and shouted and stamped, and in spite of their teachers blowing whistles and running about among them with cries for silence, they continued the uproar for several minutes. The chairman was very much upset. He quite broke down, and said that in all the thirty years during which he had worked for blind people he had never realised how he and others had unwittingly hurt their feelings. He added that he should make it his special business to see that there was as little as possible said about blind people being afflicted at this particular school in future, and I am quite sure that those conducting it will find the children respond in a remarkable manner to treatment which places them on a level with other human beings.

Last month I said something about the activities of the party of blind musicians who are touring the country for the benefit of St. Dunstan's. They recently gave a performance at Aldershot, and this is an extract from a letter received by Lady Pearson from Colonel Brooke, commanding the cavalry there: "Everyone thought your blind musicians quite excellent, and the regimental sergeant-major told me he had never known the soldiers so keen before. They

all said it was by far the most interesting concert given in Aldershot since the war began." The organisation of the tours of this concert party is no joke; something is always going wrong somewhere, and leading to elaborate rearrangements. Lady Pearson and her staff are kept very busy in securing the smooth running of the enterprise.

I daresay many of you have derived as much amusement as I have from the wonder expressed by people who perceive in our accomplishment of quite simple things something almost miraculous. An interesting instance of this came my way the other day. I often go for a trot to the top of Portland Place and back before breakfast. There are three side streets to be crossed, and the other morning just as I was nearing one of them I heard a cart approach. I slowed up, the cart stopped just in front of me, I walked round it and continued on my way. A few yards on a friend caught me up and said,

"By Jove! It was wonderful to see the way you avoided that cart. I made sure you were going to run into it."

"Why?" said I.

"Because of its unusual length," was the reply.

"Well now," said I, "think for a minute of what I had to do. When the cart stopped I knew that the horse was immediately in front of me, for I could hear him breathing. I smelt the coal, and therefore knew that the cart was a long one, so I made a good wide detour, and here I am."

"Wonderful!" he said. "You blind people really are marvels."

To which I replied, "We are nothing of the kind. We simply utilise senses which your possession of sight leads you to leave almost unused." And that, I am sure you will all agree with me, is all that there really is to most of the apparently wonderful things which fairly expert blind people can do.

—C. A. P.

Picture: Page 1 of Notes by the Chief, Sir Arthur Pearson, from the December 1916 Review.

Picture: Page 2 of Notes by the Chief, Sir Arthur Pearson, from the December 1916 Review.



## A Letter from Matron. Review September 1917.

### A Letter from Matron.

My dear Boys of St. Dunstan's,

I have been asked to write something for the Magazine. I hardly know how to begin or what to say. I could write pages of all the wonderful work of Sir Arthur Pearson for you boys, but you must all know and feel what he does for your happiness while here and after you leave, to make you independent and able to earn your own living, like the splendid independent sons of Empire that you *all* are.

I must say my first thoughts on coming to St. Dunstan's were that it would be a very sad post for me; but since being here I find you all so "merry and bright" and cheery at work and play, that it is proving the jolliest job I ever had. After all, as many of you have said to me, it might have been worse had you been helpless and bedridden. So there you are,

brave and fearless sons of Britain, and no one is more proud of you all than I am. Good luck to you all, and God bless you, and all belonging to you.

Many thanks to your Editor for writing in such a charming way about me in the July number, and for the kind welcome amongst you all.

Always remember, boys, I am at your service to do anything for you, however great or small, that lies in my power, and never hesitate to call on me at any time to help you.

You have my unbounded admiration in every way, from what I have seen since being here, and with my love to you all, my splendid Sons of Empire,

Your devoted Matron,  
FRANCES HUGHES.

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**Picture:** The Letter from Matron, Frances Hughes, was taken from the September 1917 Review. Matron Hughes replaced Miss Davidson, who had been Matron from our inception.



**Picture:** Matron Hughes, who was a keen musician, is shown at our First World War Training centre in London's Regent's Park as an early blind veteran dances with one of the VADs.



# St. Dunstan's Review

A MONTHLY RECORD OF WORK AND SPORT

No. 6.—NEW SERIES.

DECEMBER, 1916.

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## Editorial Notes

**T**HIS number completes our first six months, and I desire to say that I am as surprised as I am pleased at the success of our Magazine. We have now over 130 subscribers on our list who have paid for the REVIEW to be sent to them regularly by post, and we have made a small profit on each issue. At the end of this number you will find a subscription form, if any readers wish to avail themselves of it.

It has been my aim to make the Magazine self-supporting, so that it should not be in any way a tax on our funds, and next month I hope to be able to state the exact sum that we can hand over as our contribution towards the support of St. Dunstan's Hostel.

I want to thank all those old boys who, in response to my remarks last month, have sent me letters of appreciation of the REVIEW and expressive of the pleasure they derive from reading about the things that are happening to us here. They evince the greatest interest in our doings, and show how glad they are to keep in touch with St. Dunstan's in their new homes.

I want everyone who is connected in the present or in the past with Sir Arthur Pearson's Hostel for Blinded Soldiers and Sailors to remember that I want to hear from them constantly as to how they are getting on and what they are doing. The more often they write to me the more I shall be gratified. Any letters which are intended to be useful to the Magazine should reach me not later than the 20th of each month. The least thing that happens to any of our boys, old or new, will interest the ST. DUNSTAN'S REVIEW.

I hear that some of the subscribers, owing to the conditions of the post, do not always receive their Magazines. They are all posted from here not later than the 3rd of the month, so that they should be received on the 5th at latest. Anyone who does not receive his copy by the morning of the 5th should write to me at once.

All that I have to do now is to wish you a happy Christmas holiday and the best of good luck throughout the coming year.

THE EDITOR.

## Lord Ashcroft KCMG PC. Protector of the Brave. By Catherine Goodier.

The 4th (Service) Battalion, the first of the Service Battalions raised by Lord Kitchener, came into being on 7th August 1914, under Lieutenant Colonel FM Gillespie, then commanding the Depot, with a nucleus of regular officers and NCOs. It joined the 40th Brigade of the 13th Division and served in Gallipoli and in Mesopotamia. In these two campaigns it worthily upheld the traditions of the Twenty-Fourth and added two Victoria Crosses to the roll.

The first of the two Victoria Crosses was awarded to Captain Angus Buchanan, later known as the blind VC.

Despatched from Egypt to Mesopotamia in February 1916, the 13th Division took part in the sanguinary battles of the spring of 1916 fought by the Mesopotamian Expeditionary Force in the vain efforts to relieve General Townshend in Kut. These actions consisted for the most part of desperate attacks on strongly entrenched lines carried out in cold, mud and rain, and in circumstances of the greatest hardships to the troops.

The spirit of the 4th Battalion was more than equal to the demands made upon it but General Townshend's position was becoming more desperate that there was no time to lose. The 4th Battalion had spent two wet days out in the open in trenches. However, by 4th April 1916 the ground was dry and so after dark the battalion moved into the forward assembly trenches. The attack by the 7th (Meerut) Division was being delivered by all three brigades abreast. The attack started at 0455 on 5th April. Finding their initial objective unoccupied, the 4th Battalion advanced at 0730 to the next Turkish position at Fallahiya.

The ground was devoid of cover, and the firing became more intense as they neared the enemy positions. The battalion's machine gunners took advantage of a communication trench from which they could provide covering fire, while others worked their way forward. During one of these rushes, Captain Stewart Hemingway fell, dangerously wounded, and one of his men, going to his help, was hit and disabled. Captain Buchanan thereupon dashed from cover and not only carried Hemingway in despite heavy fire but, going out again, brought back the private soldier. Captain Hemingway died of his wounds the next day.

**Picture:** Editorial Notes from the December 1916 Review Editor William Girling.



For his most conspicuous bravery on 5th April 1916 Captain Buchanan, 4th (Service) Battalion, The South Wales Borderers, was awarded the Victoria Cross.

The Citation in The London Gazette of 26th September 1916 read:

'For most conspicuous bravery. During an attack an Officer was lying out in the open severely wounded about 150 yards from cover. Two men went to his assistance and one of them was hit at once. Captain Buchanan, on seeing this, immediately went out and with the help of the other man, carried the wounded man to cover under heavy machine gun fire. He then returned and brought in the wounded man, again under heavy fire.'

After being wounded again later in the day on which he won the Victoria Cross, Captain Buchanan was sent to India to recuperate. He rejoined his battalion in Mesopotamia on 1st August 1916. He was slightly wounded for a third time on 24th September 1916 but returned to his company after three days. On 13th February 1917, whilst engaged in fierce combat, a sniper's bullet struck him in the right temple, rendering him totally blind. This caused him to relinquish his commission on account of his wounds on 2nd September 1917, but he was allowed to retain the rank of Captain. Captain Buchanan received his Victoria Cross from HM King George V at a special ceremony at Durdham Down, Bristol on 8th November 1917.

After a year at our First World War training centre in London's Regent's Park, where he learnt to be blind and gain victory over blindness, Angus Buchanan VC MC returned to his studies at Oxford where he gained a law degree. Having rowed at Regent's Park he became a member of the College rowing eight. He became a Solicitor and went into partnership with Mr G Brocklehurst Taylor at Coleford in 1929. From September 1933, Angus conducted the practice alone until his early death on 1st March 1944 at the age of 49 from wounds sustained during his Great War Service. He was buried in Coleford Cemetery with full military honours. The Times newspaper of 3rd March 1944 remarked that 'Few men have faced adversity with greater cheerfulness and patience than Angus Buchanan'.

Today Captain Buchanan's medal group, which includes his Victoria Cross, Military Cross (MC), 1914-15 Star, British War Medal (1914-20), Victory Medal (1914-19) plus MiD Oakleaf, King George VI Coronation Medal (1937) Knight, Order of St Vladimir (Russia) are on display for all the world to see in The Lord Ashcroft Gallery at the Imperial War Museum, London.

The Review had the great honour to meet with Lord Ashcroft in the Lord Ashcroft Gallery, when we found out how this wonderful man, who keeps the names of the bravest alive, feels as he stands in the gallery that bears his name.

**Review:** Lord Ashcroft can you please tell us of the origin of your interest in bravery and Victoria Crosses and George Crosses and what for you these distinguished decorations stand for?

**Lord Ashcroft:** "My interest in bravery dates back to when I was a small boy. My father, the late Eric Ashcroft, was a modest man, but he eventually told me about his experiences as a young officer during the D-Day Landings when he ran up Sword Beach in Normandy in the early hours of June 6th 1944.

"My father was wounded and the Commanding Officer was shot by his side by a German Sniper and from that I gradually developed a wider interest in courage in general, and gallantry medals in particular.

"The Victoria Cross was created as the namesake says by Queen Victoria in 1856 and it's Britain and the Commonwealth's most prestigious award for bravery in the face of the enemy. And nowadays, like the George Cross, it can be awarded to both living men and women and it can be awarded posthumously.

"The George Cross was introduced by George VI in 1940 and it's Britain and the Commonwealth's most prestigious award for gallantry not in the face of the enemy. It is often affectionately known as the civilian VC, but in fact most of its recipients served in the Armed Forces and the majority of these carried out bomb disposal work.

"To me the recipients of both the Victoria Cross and George Cross deserve to be regarded in that special category of the bravest of the brave."

**Review:** In your book Victoria Cross Heroes you wrote that it was years before a suitable VC turned up for sale. Could you please tell us why in 1986 the Victoria Cross of Leading Seaman James Magennis interested you when others hadn't?



**Lord Ashcroft:** "The reality is that for many years I had neither the financial resources nor the time to devote to the collecting of these gallantry medals, but however having made a little money as an entrepreneur, and with some more time on my hands in the mid 1980s, I was finally in a position to bid for a Victoria Cross. The VC awarded to Leading Seaman James Magennis came up for auction in the summer of 1986 and I was immediately taken by the recipient's outstanding courage.

"Magennis had shown astonishing courage. He was the diver on a midget submarine when his craft became wedged off Malaysia between the Japanese warship that it was targeting, and the sea floor. Showing great bravery and overcoming huge difficulties he freed the charge that had become stuck to the ship and the midget submarine was then able to escape from the scene.

"The VC was awarded in 1945, the year in fact before I was born, and Magennis himself was a bit of a character, in truth a hard drinking Irishman, and so both the VC action, and its recipient appealed to me."

**Review:** Today we are standing in front of the Victoria Cross for Angus Buchanan who remains Blind Veterans UK's highest decorated member of our charity for his most conspicuous bravery during action at the Fallujah Lines on April 5th 1916.

Paul Jacobs GM who is with us today is presently the highest decorated living member of our charity, although only 26 years old. He was blinded on Afghanistan's frontline on 20th August 2009 and was awarded the George Medal for the courage and bravery he displayed on that day, although from citations that I have read that were written by his Commanding Officer he displayed that courage and bravery throughout his service.

Can you please tell us how and when the Victoria Cross of Angus Buchanan came into your possession and what it was that interested you in Angus Buchanan?

**Lord Ashcroft:** "I was able to buy Buchanan's medal privately in 2003 as I was hugely impressed in Buchanan's bravery, not just in his VC action but on several other occasions.

"Buchanan was initially awarded the MC for bravery at Gallipoli, now part of modern day Turkey, on January 7th 1916 when in command of a company in trenches east of what was called Gully Ravine.

"And on March 4th 1916 Captain Buchanan arrived in Mesopotamia, which is now Iraq of course, and on April 5th he took part in the action for which he did receive the VC. Buchanan courageously saved two wounded comrades from No Man's Land. First with the help of another man he rescued under heavy machine gun fire a wounded officer who was lying some 150 yards from cover. He then returned and brought in a second wounded man, again under heavy fire. Incidentally the second man had been wounded and he went to help the injured officer.

"Later that same day on April 5th Buchanan was wounded in fighting against the Turks and his VC was announced in September 1916 at which point he still had his sight. King George V pinned the Victoria Cross and the Military Cross on Captain Buchanan's uniform on November 8th 1917 at a ceremony honouring 127 medal recipients, which was attended in fact by thousands of people.

"By this point Buchanan, then aged only 23, had lost his sight and he was thereafter known affectionately as the blind VC. In fact Buchanan received his most serious injuries on February 13th 1917. This is when he lost the sight in both eyes as a result of being hit in the head by a sniper's bullet."

**Review:** Before the VC and medal group of Angus Buchanan came into your possession had you heard of his exceptional bravery and did you know that he had been blinded and after training at Blind Veterans UK, then St Dunstan's, he returned to Jesus College, Oxford where he read law and later worked in a solicitor's office?

**Lord Ashcroft:** "I wasn't actually aware of the bravery of Angus Buchanan prior to the medal group being offered to me. It should be stressed that a VC has been awarded more than 1,350 times, and so even the greatest medal experts don't really know the background to every VC action. I was, however, aware of St Dunstan's, now of course Blind Veterans UK, and of its work because of my support over the years as a philanthropist for various charities for the blind and partially sighted.

"It was only after being offered Buchanan's VC that I also learnt of his amazing life, including his work as a solicitor after he ended the Great War Service."



**Review:** Again in your book, *Victoria Cross Heroes*, you write that you did not initially set out with the idea of owning more than one Victoria Cross. As your collection grew did you feel a burden of responsibility and is that what led you to establish The Michael A Ashcroft Trust and The Lord Ashcroft Gallery?

**Lord Ashcroft:** "When I first heard of the Victoria Cross as a school boy I read many of the stories and I then read in the newspaper at some point that a Victoria Cross had been sold and I thought that would be a wonderful thing to own a Victoria Cross. It was a life's ambition, and in 1986 with the Magennis VC, the first Victoria Cross that I purchased, it was intended to be just a one off. But when the medal was delivered to me at my office and I was holding it in one hand and re-reading the story of the courage of Leading Seaman Magennis a frisson went through me that perhaps only a collector can really appreciate, and I knew at that point of time, instead of being the end of the quest, it was only the beginning.

"By the time I had collected over 20 Victoria Crosses I became a little uncomfortable that this wonderful collection should be in private hands for one person. And it was from that point of time that I realised that the medals had to go on public display sometime in the future. But I had in fact collected about 100 Victoria Crosses before it had leaked out as to who the purchaser was. And then I started the quest to find the ideal place where the public could admire the bravery of these men and women, and of course the Imperial War Museum was right at the top of the list as the place in which the display should be. Today I have in the collection around 190 Victoria Crosses and with a contribution that I made to the Imperial War Museum to enable them to build the gallery it's here today with over a million visitors every year who come to admire and read about the courage of these amazing people."

**Review:** How does it feel standing here today knowing that you've made this happen and that you keep the names of these men and women alive throughout the world?

**Lord Ashcroft:** "Well, this gallery is one of my pride and joys. I never thought when I started off in just wanting to have just one Victoria Cross that it would eventually lead to a gallery like this, which is honouring the courage of so many, including Odette Hallows, who received the George Cross.

"To come along to the gallery when there's a group of schoolboys here and you hear one shout across 'Oi come here and listen to what this geezer done!' just sends a chill, but a pleasant one through me that this quest, and what has happened here, has all been worthwhile."

**Review:** I know from my own work that I am often humbled by the people I meet. Not just people like Paul who is the humblest person and I embarrass him greatly every time I mention his George Medal, but obviously most of the people who come to us now have Macular Degeneration and it's meeting them and seeing how they put their guts into life to learn to live with their sight loss.

How do you feel when you meet living recipients of the Victoria Cross and the George Cross?

**Lord Ashcroft:** "Well over the years I've met many of the recipients, many more of course in the early days for those who had been awarded the Victoria Cross through the Second World War and are sadly no longer with us today. I found that experience extremely moving and extremely humbling. If you met many of these recipients in a pub you wouldn't be able to say: 'Do you know I've worked out that's the sort of guy who would have the Victoria Cross.' You'd probably have guessed wrongly and have gone to somebody who acted more like the local bully. But yet the quiet man in the corner was the man who had won the gallantry award.

"They showed great humility and of course many times they simply didn't want to talk about what had happened. But having written the book *Victoria Cross Heroes* it was important for me, with the journalist hat on, to be able to add some more colour to the narrative of what they did, rather than perhaps what happened or was written in the citation itself.

"So they were always good company to be with and I was just proud to be in a position from the outside to honour people for what they did knowing that I was never a participant in that. I didn't serve in the Armed Forces and I questioned myself: 'Would I have the courage if I were faced with that situation and what would I do and how would I react?' I've never really been able, for myself, to answer that question."



**Paul Jacobs:** "It's a strange one because your body takes over. The mind doesn't think the body just takes over. So people like Beharry, who I've met a few times at events, and obviously what he did was outrageously courageous, but he will say the same, your body just takes over as it's just drilled into you, soldier, sailor or as the boss [Nick Caplin] here Airman.

**Lord Ashcroft:** Well if you recall there is one Victoria Cross which was awarded in World War One where they were handling a box of grenades and a pin came out and it dropped on to the floor and there were 19 men in a trench. One man threw himself on top of that grenade, blew himself to pieces, but the other 18 were saved, and so you ask yourself the question, that man had a decision to make, which was hardly a second.

"There are many cases where the acts of bravery are spur of the moment, and as you've just said Paul, where something takes over that you don't have time to think, it's an instinct, it's an 'I have to do'. Whether it's for a friend, a mate, the Regiment, it's never really the cause of the battle itself; it's something very personal to those around you.

**Paul Jacobs:** "As a soldier and an infantryman it's not just your friends that you're fighting for, it's also the flag, as it has been for hundreds of years, right back to when we rode on horseback as Knights. The flag is very, very important. For example in Afghanistan when we had to leave FOB Gibraltar as there were too many IEDs and the enemy was just too much for our small advance, it was a very sad day and there were a lot of tears because we couldn't hold it and the flag was taken down. It was a very, very sad day as it is the flag that represents everything. There are two flags. There's the Regimental Flag and the Union Flag. It was a very, very sad day and it's a day that I remember because we couldn't hold on to something.

**Lord Ashcroft:** "Going back to rescue the flag has been a feature through history, hasn't it?"

**Paul Jacobs:** "Yes. For sure."

**Lord Ashcroft:** "And men have risked their lives just to save the flag."

**Paul Jacobs:** "If I had my sight I still would."

**Nick Caplin:** "I'm struck also by the issue of courage and how that's affected also in the battle against blindness, as in the blind VC, but also some of our young war blind today. We have other young soldiers like Paul who were blinded in battle and the courage that they display in overcoming those challenges is extraordinary, absolutely extraordinary."

**Lord Ashcroft:** "I congratulate you Paul on doing this work and helping through this cause and what you're doing now. Ten out of 10 mate."

Lord Ashcroft you are our hero, and the hero of the Victoria Cross and George Cross recipients whom you keep alive for all the world to know of them and their astonishing acts of bravery and courage. The Lord Ashcroft Gallery is a magnificent monument to heroism.

We would like to thank Lord Ashcroft KCMG PC, to whom we are indebted for giving us so much of his time. Angela Entwistle, Corporate Communications Director in Lord Ashcroft's Office, who has worked with Lord Ashcroft since 1986 when he bought his first Victoria Cross, the VC of Leading Seaman James Magennis. Vicky Dumble in Lord Ashcroft's office. Roisin Joyce, Development Manager, Imperial War Museums. Junior Cummings IWM, London. Rebecca Maciejewska, Secretary of The VC and GC Association. Stephen Farish of The Regimental Museum of The Royal Welsh and Ruth Duncan, Curator, The Gordon Highlanders Museum.

And we extend our deepest gratitude to our very great friend, Blind Veterans UK Vice Patron, General Sir Peter de la Billière KCB KBE DSO MC & Bar. He is the author of many books that includes Supreme Courage, a collection of heroic stories from 150 Years of the Victoria Cross.

Lord Ashcroft's Victoria Cross Heroes (Michael Ashcroft) is published by Headline Review and the foreword is written by HRH The Prince of Wales. It tells the stories of over 150 individuals whose bravery has earned them the Victoria Cross. Each chapter covers a different conflict, from the Crimean War to Iraq.

The Lord Ashcroft Gallery, which showcases the world's largest collection of Victoria Crosses, is housed on the 5th floor of The Imperial War Museum, Lambeth Road, London SE1 6HZ. It is open daily from 10am to 6pm and admission is free. It is fully accessible and audio descriptions are available.





**Picture:** Angus Buchanan VC MC, seated fourth from the right in the second row at a Reunion of the First World War blind veterans. Ian Fraser, who was our Chairman for 53 years, is seated in the centre of the second row and is shown holding his knee.

**Picture below left:** For Valour. The Victoria Cross. **Picture below right:** Captain Angus Buchanan VC MC, 4th (Service) Battalion, The South Wales Borderers. **Copyright:** Portrait supplied by Stephen Farish, The Regimental Museum of The Royal Welsh.



## Captain Sir Beachcroft Towse, VC KCVO CBE 1st Battalion The Gordon Highlanders, 19th Brigade.

Angus Buchanan VC MC remains the highest decorated member of our charity throughout our 100 years of service, but two holders of the Victoria Cross have been involved in our work.

In the Chairman's Notes of the July 1948 Review Ian Fraser wrote:

'St Dunstan's and the blind world generally mourn the loss of three good friends. Senior in age and service, Captain Sir Beachcroft Towse, VC KCVO CBE, passed away on June 21st at the age of eighty-four. Since he lost his sight in action in the Boer War in 1900, his life had been devoted to the service of blind people. Two acts of extreme bravery won him the award of the Victoria Cross, but the second act — the defence of a post with twelve men against 150 Boers — cost him his sight. He joined the Council of the National Institute for the Blind in 1901 and became its chairman in 1921, a position which he held until 1944, when ill-health forced him to resign. During the 1914-18 war, he visited wounded men in hospital in France. I remember as I lay in hospital being told that a blind VC was coming to visit me, perhaps to write letters for me. As it happened, I did not meet him then, as I moved on, but the thought remained with me that if this blind man, could write letters, there might be other useful things which I, too could do.

'Many young blinded soldiers owed their first incentive to Captain Towse. I met him later at Portland Place [the officers' house] and for many years we served together on various committees. He became a Vice President of St Dunstan's in 1946 and was a national vice president of the British Legion. We salute the passing of a gallant soldier and comrade.'

### From The Victoria Cross and George Cross Association.

Ernest Beachcroft Beckwith Towse VC (later Sir Ernest Beachcroft Beckwith Towse VC) Captain 1st Battalion The Gordon Highlanders, 19th Brigade.

The Citation in The London Gazette 6th July 1900 read:

'On the 11th December, 1899, at the action of Majestontein, Captain Towse was brought to notice by his Commanding Officer for his gallantry and devotion in assisting the late Colonel Downman, when mortally wounded, in the retirement, and endeavouring, when close up to the front of the firing line,



to carry Colonel Downman on his back; but finding this not possible, Captain Towse supported him till joined by Colour Sergeant Nelson and Lance Corporal Hodgson.

'On the 30th April, 1900, Captain Towse, with twelve men, took up a position on the top of Mount Thaba, far away from support. A force of about 150 Boers attempted to seize the same plateau, neither party appearing to see the other until they were but 100 yards apart. Some of the Boers then got within 40 yards of Captain Towse and his party, and called on him to surrender. He at once caused his men to open fire and remained firing himself until severely wounded (both eyes shattered), succeeding in driving off the Boers. The gallantry of this Officer in vigorously attacking the enemy (for he not only fired, but charged forward) saved the situation, notwithstanding the numerical superiority of the Boers.'



**Picture:** Captain Ernest Beachcroft Beckwith Towse VC KCVO CBE. **Copyright:** The Gordon Highlanders Museum, Aberdeen.



**Picture:** Captain Beachcroft Towse VC KVCO CBE with HM Queen Victoria at his VC Investiture on 18th July 1900 at Windsor Castle. **Copyright:** The Gordon Highlanders Museum, Aberdeen.



## Sergeant John McAulay VC DCM, 1st Battalion Scots Guards.



**Picture:** From the October 1918 Review captioned: Serget McAulay VC DCM, who won his VC at Bourslon Wood, coaches St Dunstaners in Athletic Sports in his spare time.

Sergeant John McAulay VC DCM was the Athletic Sports Coach in 1918 at our First World War training centre in London's Regent's Park. He was awarded the Victoria Cross for his actions on 27th November 1917 at Fontaine Notre Dame, France.

Sergeant McAulay was mentioned in the Review of November 1918: Physical Training will commence during November, and each annex will form its own class under the guidance of a physical training expert. Sergt. McAulay VC, of the Scots Guards has kindly offered to give us his valuable services, both for physical training and for tug of war, as far as his military duties will permit. The second contest for the Pearson Tug of War Challenge Cup (catch weight) will take place early in December.

Information from the Victoria Cross and George Cross Association read:

Fontaine Notre Dame, France. 27th November 1917.

'From 23rd to 28th November 1917 the Battle of Cambrai centred on the British attempt to capture Bourslon Wood on a ridge due west of Cambrai. On 27th November 1917, 1st Battalion Scots Guards took part in an unsuccessful assault on Fontaine Notre Dame, astride the Cambrai-Bapaume Road, south east of Bourslon Wood. One company was sent along the sunken road north from Cantaign to try and link up with the Grenadier Guards in the village but came under very heavy enemy machine gun fire. When all his officers had become casualties, Sergeant J McAulay assumed command and beat back an enemy counter attack. He also carried his dying company commander, Lieutenant Kinnaird, more than 500 yards to safety.'

The London Gazette of 8th January 1918 read:

'For most conspicuous bravery and initiative in attack. When all his officers had become casualties Serjt. McAulay assumed command of the company and under shell and machine gun fire successfully held and consolidated the objective gained. He reorganised the company, cheered on and encouraged his men, and under heavy fire at close quarters showed utter disregard of danger.

'Noticing a counter-attack developing on his exposed left flank, he successfully repulsed it by the skilful and bold use of machine guns, aided by two men only, causing heavy enemy casualties.

'Sergeant McAulay also carried his company commander, who was mortally wounded, a long distance to a place of safety under heavy fire. Twice he was knocked down by the concussion of a bursting shell, but, nothing daunted, he continued on his way until his objective was achieved, killing two of the enemy who endeavoured to intercept him.

'Throughout the day this very gallant Non Commissioned Officer displayed the highest courage, tactical skill, and coolness under exceptionally trying circumstances.'

His VC Investiture took place on the 16th March by King George V, at Buckingham Palace.



## Odette Hallowes GC MBE.

The photograph on the facing page shows Odette Hallowes (Mrs) GC MBE, Chevalier de la Légion d'honneur, with Bill Griffiths MBE at the annual POW Reunion at the Brighton centre in April 1986. Bill was a well-known blind veteran who lost his sight and both hands during the Second World War when he was a prisoner of the Japanese. Former POWs who attended the Reunion always recalled how Odette asked them not to stand too close to her toes.

The George Cross and medal group of Odette Hallowes (née Sansom) are held in The Lord Ashcroft Gallery. Together with her medals the display includes her pistol, two dolls that she made whilst a prisoner, and the dark uniform she had tailored in case she was captured as it would not show the dirt.

She was born Odette Marie Céline Brailly in Amiens, France, the daughter of the First World War hero Gaston Brailly, who was killed at Verdun in 1918. At seven, she caught poliomyelitis, and spent a year blind.

During the Second World War she was enrolled in Special Forces of the First Aid Nursing Yeomanry (FANY) and trained by Colonel Maurice Buckmaster's Special Operations Executive to be sent into Nazi-occupied France to work with the French Resistance.

She made a landing near Cannes in 1942, where she made contact with her supervisor, Peter Churchill. Using the code name Lise, she brought him funds and acted as his courier. Churchill's operation in France was infiltrated by Hugo Bleicher, an Abwehr counterintelligence officer, who arrested Odette and Churchill at the Hôtel de la Poste in Saint-Jorioz on 16th April 1943; they were then sent to Fresnes Prison. Although tortured by the Sicherheitsdienst who used a red-hot poker, and pulled out her toes nails, she stuck to her cover story that Churchill was the nephew of Prime Minister Winston Churchill, and that she was his wife. The hope was that in this way their treatment would be mitigated.

She was condemned to death in June 1943, although a time for execution was not specified, and sent to Ravensbrück concentration camp.

Odette survived the war partly thanks to her alias of "Churchill". The British had calculated that if the Germans thought she was related to the British Prime Minister, they would want to keep her alive as a possible bargaining tool. And

so it turned out, for with the Allies only a few miles from Ravensbrück, Camp commandant Fritz Suhren took Sansom with him and drove with her to the U.S. base to surrender to the Americans. He hoped that her supposed connections to Churchill might allow him to negotiate his way out of execution.

Subsequently, Odette testified against the prison guards charged with war crimes at the 1946 Hamburg Ravensbrück Trials.





## Paul Jacobs GM.

Paul Jacobs GM joined Blind Veterans UK in 2009 after he was blinded in Afghanistan when he also sustained injury to his arm and leg. Since losing his career as a Rifleman, which was his life and his family, he has dedicated himself to charitable work, working with people with dementia and mentoring young children who have early stage vision loss. He has taken part in an endless list of sporting activities that include marathons, triathlons and tandem cycle rides, and within 10 months of coming out of hospital Paul climbed Mount Kilimanjaro, all to raise awareness of, and funds for, Blind Veterans UK.

An accomplished poet he proved himself in the literary field, when, in 2014, David Dimbleby closed the Remembrance Sunday broadcast from the Cenotaph with Paul's poem *Fallen Saints*, a poem that Paul wrote for his friends who were killed in Afghanistan. And in 2015 Paul joined the staff of the Review.

Someone who does not readily speak of the reason he was awarded the George Medal at an investiture at Buckingham Palace by HM The Queen in 2010, his medal citation is set out below.

### **George Medal, Rifleman Paul Raymond Jacobs, The Rifles. Rifleman, Upper Sangin Valley, Helmand Province, Afghanistan.**

Rifleman Jacobs was on patrol with his Vallon mine detector leading his patrol up one of the most heavily IEDd stretches of road in the whole of Afghanistan. An alleyway had been isolated to deny the enemy the opportunity to attack by command wire and a member of his Company was clearing south down the alley-way when there was an enormous explosion resulting in the soldier being fatally wounded. Jacobs, all alone less a single cover man, immediately set about clearing up to and around the body. As he did so, he confirmed that a secondary device, lying on the surface, was not touching. As he moved back up the alleyway towards his cover man who had now come forward, another device suddenly exploded, killing his comrade. Jacobs was seriously wounded, suffering severe fragmentation damage to his eyes but bleeding heavily from multiple wounds, he had the presence of mind and experience to drag himself back onto the safe route he had just cleared and into a position where his extraction would be safer to others. His sheer personal courage and startling determination, unswerving courage, selflessness, devotion to duty and dedication to his comrades was faultless.'



**Picture:** Rifleman Paul Jacobs, 2nd Battalion The Rifles, is decorated with The George Medal by HM The Queen at Buckingham Palace. **Copyright:** PA Photos Limited not for reproduction outside the pages of this Review.



## Second Lieutenant Sidney Clayton Woodroffe VC. 8th Battalion, the Rifle Brigade (Prince Consort's Own). By Paul Jacobs GM.

One of the Victoria Crosses held in Lord Ashcroft's collection at The Lord Ashcroft Gallery, is that of 2nd Lieutenant Sidney Woodroffe VC, 8th Battalion, the Rifle Brigade (Prince Consort's Own). A Battalion of my former Regiment. I am proud to have served with 2nd Battalion, the Rifles, and on 30th July I was privileged to be a guest at the unveiling of the Victoria Cross Commemorative Paving Stone to 2nd Lieut Woodroffe VC at Lewes Library. It was part of a nationwide Government project to honour hundreds of First World War heroes who were awarded the Victoria Cross.

The date of 30th July is a significant one, as it was on that day one hundred years ago that Woodroffe earned his Victoria Cross. It was also the day on which he lost his life.

I would like to thank my former Commanding Officer, Brigadier Rob Thomson CBE DSO, as I was humbled to be included at the unveiling and to be mentioned in his speech in the same sentence as Sidney Woodroffe VC.

Below is an extract from Lord Ashcroft's book, Victoria Cross Heroes that was read at the unveiling.

'Sidney Woodroffe was born in Lewes, Sussex, on 17th December 1895 and was educated at Marlborough College, where he was a senior prefect and represented the school at rugby, cricket and hockey. He then attended Pembroke College, Cambridge, gaining a classical scholarship. He joined the Rifle Brigade two days before Christmas 1914 and went to France in May of the following year before winning the VC for conspicuous bravery at Hooge, Flanders.'

Woodroffe's father, who lost three of his four sons in the Great War, received a letter from Lieutenant R.C. Maclachlan which spelled out precisely how courageous Sidney had been:

'Your younger boy was simply one of the bravest of the brave, and the work he did that day will stand out as a record hard to beat. When the line was attacked and broken on his right he still held the trench, and only when the Germans

were discovered to be in the rear of him did he leave it. He finally brought his command back, and then took part in the counter-attack. He was killed out in front, in the open, cutting the wire to enable the attack to be continued. This is the bald statement of his part of that day's action. He risked his life for others right through the day and finally gave it for the sake of his men. He was a splendid type of young officer, always bold as a lion, confident and sure of himself too. The loss he is to me personally is very great, as I have learnt to appreciate what a sterling fine lad he was. His men would have followed him anywhere.'

Lieutenant Woodroffe's parents received their son's VC at an investiture by King George V at Buckingham Palace on 29th November 1916. The VC was sold privately to Lord Ashcroft in 2001 and is on display in the The Lord Ashcroft Gallery of the Imperial War Museum in London.

A recording of the unveiling ceremony of the Victoria Cross Commemorative Paving Stone for Sidney Woodroffe VC is included in the Talking Review.

There is no known grave to Sidney Woodroffe, but he is commemorated on the Menin Gate Memorial To The Missing. Rest In Peace.



**Picture:** From left to right: Brigadier Rob Thomson CBE DSO, 2nd Lieutenant Josh Miers 4th Battalion the Rifles, Paul Jacobs GM, Major Ron Cassidy MBE Late the Rifles Brigade, Major Mark Scrase-Dickins CMG DL Late the Rifles Brigade, The Lord-Lieutenant of East Sussex Mr Peter Field DL and The Mayor of Lewes Cllr Susan Murray.